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ABSTRACT

Two brief studies on community college social science textbook readability are compiled in this document. The first study compared textbook readability in 1977 to the findings of previous research. When the readability levels of community college social science textbooks were compared with the reading levels of the community college population in 1970, it was discovered that at least half of the textbooks were written at levels inappropriate to the 12.44 reading grade level of the students. However, readability research conducted in 1977 indicated that reading levels in social science texts had been generally lowered to the 10th grade level, making them more readable to community college populations than five or ten years ago. In a second study, a survey of community college social science instructors concerning appropriate reading levels in their assigned textbooks indicated divided opinion among the 25 respondents on whether the individual teacher or departmental concensus should determine textbook selection, but all felt that textbook readability grade placement levels should be made available to textbook selectors and most wanted student reading grade placement level information prior to the start of each semester. The questionnaire and tabulated results are included. (LH)

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READABILITY LEVELS AND FACULTY ATTITUDES TOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE SOCIAL SCIENCE TEXTBOOKS

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE SOCIAL SCIENCE TEXTBOOKS ARE EASIER TO READ

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A survey of the literature dealing with the reading grade placement levels of community college students, leads to the conclusion that average reading level of students at community colleges is somewhere around the twelfth grade level. (McClellan 1970, Hagstrom 1971, Cline 1971, Martin 1971).

In 1977, The Nelson-Denny Reading Test Form C was administered to 375 students at a West Florida community college. The results produced an average reading grade placement level of 12.44, similar to the results in the earlier studies.

Three researchers (Cline 1971, Hagstrom 1971, McClellan 1970) examined the readability levels of community college textbooks in comparison with the reading levels of the community college population.

In 1970, Dorinda Ann McClellan reported the results of the application of the Dale-Chall Readability formula on twenty textbooks utilized at a Florida community college. Of the twenty texts analyzed, eight had readability level scores of 16+ (College-Adult Level), four had readability level scores of 13-15, six had readability level scores of 11-12 and two had scores of 9-10. Of the social science texts examined in the study, the two political science texts and one social science text, had readability levels of 16+, and the one sociology and one geography text had

readability levels of 13-15. McClellan determined that almost half of the texts were inappropriate for the learner.

Of the twenty-nine required texts evaluated in Jon Hagstrom's research with the Dale-Chall formula, six had readability levels of 16+, nine had readability levels of 13-15, ten had readability levels of 11-12, and four had readability levels of 9-10. Hagstrom noted that half of the books were inappropriate for the learner at his California community college.

In the third study, Terry A. Cline reported the results of the application of the Dale-Chall Formula on seventeen textbooks utilized at a mid-Missouri community college. One textbook was placed on the 16+ readability level, eight on the 13-15 readability grade placement level, seven on the 11-12 readability levels and one on the 9-10 grade levels. Cline states that 52 percent of the textbooks are not appropriate for the learner.

All three researches suggested involvement by non-reading specialists in assuring that textbook readability levels match the reading levels of the students. One stated that readability levels should be a major factor in textbook selection.

In conducting readability research at a mid-Florida community college in 1977, six years later, there seems to be a significant decrease in the readability level of community college social science textbooks. The Dale-Chall Readability Formula was applied to twelve social science textbooks in the disciplines of political science, sociology, and psychology.

None of the textbooks had Dale-Chall readability levels of 16+ and only one textbook had a readability level of 13-15. Five of the textbooks had readability levels of 11-12 and two texts had readability levels of 9-10. Because the results appeared

significantly lower than the three previous studies the findings were suspect. Subsequent validation of the findings[1] and an interrogation[2] of textbook publishers confirmed the results. It appears that to meet the needs of community college clientele, publishers of community college social science textbooks are gearing their textbooks for the 10th grade readability level.

The earlier research may have been a catalyst for these reversed results. Of the 375 students tested, 53 percent of students had reading levels above the level of the assigned textbook, 23 percent had reading levels below the level of the textbook and 24 percent of the students had reading levels commensurate with the textbook. Further, the readability level of only one textbook was higher than average reading score of 12.44, two textbooks had lower readability levels than the average student reading level , and the readability levels of five texts matched the reading level of the students. This leads to the conclusion that present community college social science textbooks are more readable now as opposed to five or ten years ago.

[1]The Dale-Chall results were checked and verified by Erwin Franco, Ph.D. (University of Illinois), Professor of Reading.

[2]Phone interview with Ollie Campbell, Marketing Supervisor, Prentice-Hall, November 2, 1976.

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE SOCIAL SCIENCE FACULTY ARE CONCERNED WITH READING LEVELS OF STUDENTS AND MATERIALS

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE SOCIAL SCIENCE FACULTY ARE CONCERNED WITH READING LEVELS OF STUDENTS AND MATERIALS

For the most part, community college social science instructors are concerned with the reading level of materials presented to students for use in the classroom.

Recently, as part of a larger research project, a questionnaire was distributed to the thirty social science faculty members at a suburban campus of a large Florida community college. The questionnaire presented questions concerning the availability of student reading levels, the best method of textbooks selection, the instructor's perceptions of the textbooks in current use, and the reading levels of the student population to instructors of political science, sociology, psychology and history.

The complete results of the twenty-five questionnaires that were returned are presented below. Some of the findings are worthy of further note.

The faculty members responded with a divided opinion to the question: "What is the best method of textbook selection for your class?" Eleven instructors felt that each professor should select his/her own textbook, and twelve responded that a departmental consensus should be necessary to choose a text.

There was unity in responding to the question: "Should the Reading Grade Placement level be made available to the person(s) selecting the textbook?" All twenty-five instructors felt that textbook readability grade placement levels should be supplied to the person or group that will ultimately select textbooks for use in the community college classroom. Further, twenty-one of the twenty-five stated that they would like to know the student reading grade placement levels prior to the start of

the semester.

This information is provided in an effort to let reading instructors know that social science faculty members are also concerned with the progress and abilities of community college students, and attempt to match classroom material, if possible, with student levels.

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A Sample of the Professor Questionnaire and
the Tabulation of the Results

POLICY

1. In your opinion, what is the best method of textbook selection for your class
   - 11 each professor selects his own
   - 12 department meets and the concensus selects a book
   - ___ students are given alternatives to select from
   - ___ college administration assigns a textbook
   - 2 other explain

2. What method is currently used in your class?
   - 6 you select the textbook
   - 14 you meet with the department and the concensus selects book
   - 1 the department chairman selects the book
   - ___ the college administration selects the book
   - 2 you are using the textbook of your predecessor
   - 2 other: explain _____

3. If you select textbook:
   A. Do you have an ample supply and variety to select from: YES 18 NO 4 .
   B. Do you have enough time for a selection: YES 17 NO 5 .

PERCEPTIONS

1. Your perceptions of the textbook utilized in class:
   A. Book fits the needs of the students - excellent __ good 7 fair 12 poor 0.
   B. How is the material presented? TOO CUT AND DRY 1 LIVELY AND INTERESTING 6
      SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN 16 .
   C. How is the material organized: well organized 18 needs improvement 6 .
   D. Your preception of the reading grade placement level of the Textbook: below 9th Grade __, 10th 3 , 11th 7 , 12th 6 , 13th 5 , 14th 3 , 15th ___, 16th ___,17th
   E. Should the reading grade placement level be made available to you and/or the persons selecting the book: YES 25 NO 0 .

2. Did you have knowledge of your individual student's reading grade placement levels:
   A. 0 Prior to start of classes
   B. 3 During the semester
   C. 20 The reading grade placement levels are not available
   Would you like this data made available: YES 21 NO ___ . DOESN'T MATTER 4 .

3. Do you have a general knowledge of student reading grade placement levels at your institution: YES 16 NO 8
   If yes (do they appear to be in comparison with the nation)
   AVERAGE 3 BELOW AVERAGE 11 ABOVE AVERAGE 1 .
   If no would you like this data made available: YES 17 NO ___ DOESN'T MATTER 5